

**ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix AZ 85012
Thursday – September 11, 2008**

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:06 a.m. by Vice Chairman Yamanouchi.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Kenneth Yamanouchi
Thomas Heaney
Larry McKim
Bill Lunsford
Terrie Gent
George Cushing

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Joey Strickland, Director
Robert Barnes, Deputy Director
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer
Tom Creager, AZ State Veteran Home
Administrator
Lee Borgen, Veterans' Benefits Counselor

Absent

Linda Fulkerson
Gary Fredricks
Phillip Quochcytewa

Opening – Chairman Yamanouchi opened the meeting at 10.00 a.m. with appropriate ceremony and welcomed Robert Barnes, the new Deputy Director for ADVS.

Minutes – The minutes of August 16, 2008 were approved as distributed.
(Moved by Commissioner Heaney and seconded by Commissioner Lunsford)

Communications – Chairman Yamanouchi advised that he sent out 7 thank you letters related to the Glendale town hall meeting. He noted that the electronic signature on the letters was poor quality and asked Dave Hampton to check into ways to improve the signature quality.

Agency Announcements

1. Director Strickland

- Gave a brief overview of management improvements at the State Veteran Home and that he is working with VA Medical Center Phoenix to bring the Home census up to an average of 180 residents.
- Advised that about 68,000 dollars will be spent on refurbishing at the State Veteran Cemetery in Sierra Vista.
- Preparations are ongoing for the Veterans' Hall of Fame ceremony in October.
- Welcomed Mr. Robert Barnes as the new Deputy Director and briefly commented on his background and expertise.
- Introduced and welcomed Mr. Tom Creager as the new Administrator of the State Veteran Home.

2. Mr. Barnes provided a brief bio and stated that he is looking forward to working for the betterment of Arizona's veteran community. He is also a strong supporter of the Military Relief Fund.

3. Mr. Creager indicated that his first priority is to resolve all survey issues.

- Chairman Yamanouchi invited Mr. Creager to be a regular attendee at the Commission meetings and asked that the Commission be kept in the loop so that they may assist when appropriate.

Region 1 meeting

1. Commissioner Cushing expressed disappointment with the number of attendees but also stated that the level of participation by those present was very good.

2. Chairman Yamanouchi asked for lessons learned and how to get veterans to turn up for the meetings. Many suggestions were offered:

- The quality of a meeting is not dependent on the number of attendees.
- Networking is taking place, one person has a question or situation and someone else has a constructive comment, suggestion or answer.
- Personal phone calls made to elected officials appears to improve their level of participation.
- Physically visiting the veterans' organizations in the area improves advertising.
- More advance media coverage is needed.
- Perhaps ADVS could include a presentation relevant to the demographics of the town hall area such as focusing on TRICARE in an area where most of the veterans are retired military. Focus on the new GI education bill in an area where the veteran population is more recently discharged. Not more than ten minutes duration.
- Perhaps give a little more detailed information on the Commission, its duties, goals, recent accomplishments etc.; how the Commission uses info gathered at town hall meetings. Again, limit to ten minutes; the Commission's primary purpose at town halls is to listen to the attendees.
- Encourage VARO and VAMC to send a person who is knowledgeable to address claims issues and specific health care concerns (access, availability, scheduling appointments, VA repeatedly scheduling and canceling appointments etc.)

3. Director Strickland asked if the Commission makes an annual report to the Governor. Chairman Yamanouchi advised that is part of the Commission's effort to operationalize their mission and goals and develop performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan.

4. Commissioner Gent observed that there is a need to identify and reach out to the many new veteran oriented organizations that are being developed by this new generation of veterans. Also a way needs to be found to reach those young veterans who come home and do not get involved with any groups. A discussion followed on possible courses of action:

- Keep in contact with the local Wounded Warriors groups.
- ADVS receives notification when wounded veterans return to the state. Local VBC's can make contact and offer services.
- The Vet Center system is an excellent resource for returning troops suffering from PTSD.
- Since this new generation of veterans' communicates primarily electronically, think about reaching out through text messages to let veterans know about their benefits and our ability to assist.

Review of follow up actions

1. Chairman Yamanouchi asked Commissioner McKim to track issues brought up at town hall meetings, in addition to things requiring follow up actions, so that the prevalence of specific issues over time and or in multiple areas of the state may be more readily identified and addressed.

2. Current issues:

- Vehicle property tax exemption for surviving spouse of 100% disabled veteran – It appears that the local Department of Motor Vehicles' offices are not consistent in their application of current A.R.S. mandates.
- Lack of uniformity in the way various state and county educational institutions apply credit for educational accomplishments during active duty.
- The potential for Arizona Veterans' Donation Fund's to accept electronic donations.

3. Director Strickland volunteered to check into having members of the ADVS executive staff attend Commission meetings to address issues of concern and report back.

Region 4 meeting 11/15/08

1. Commissioner Lunsford advised that the meeting will be in Kingman at the VFW. First choice is the 15th, second choice is the 8th of November.

2. Chairman Yamanouchi announced that Dave Hampton will be handling all travel claims and lodging for the commissioners.

Public comments – None

Commissioners for the good of the Commission

1. Commissioner McKim advised that the next Region 3 meeting will be in the Tucson metro area on 1/10/09. He also advised that the ground breaking for the historic soldiers' program section at the Sierra Vista State Cemetery will be on 10/1/08. The project is financed totally by donations.

2. Commissioner Gent noted that there appears to be a pastoral underground developing to address mental health issues of returning veterans who for whatever reason can not or won't go to the VA for help.

3. Commissioner Heaney announced that he and Commissioner Quochoyewa and Director Strickland attended the official opening of the ADVS Veterans Services Division (VSD) office in Chinle AZ. He noted that there is a great need for advocacy and assistance in that area. He also advised that he received a commitment that if the Commission holds a town hall in April 2009, there will be two hundred veterans in attendance.

4. Commissioner Lunsford suggested that the Commission observe a moment of silence in remembrance of those who perished or suffer as the result of the 9/11 attacks. Commissioner Yamanouchi agreed and a moment of silence was observed by all present.

Adjournment – Chairman Yamanouchi adjourned the meeting at 11:40 a.m. (Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Heaney.) The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on October 9, 2008 at the Arizona State Veteran Home, 4141 North Third Street, Phoenix Arizona.

Respectfully submitted,

Lee Borgen
Secretary